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PLEASE PASS TO USDVA, ABMC

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TAGS: PREL RP
SUBJECT: PHILIPPINE FOREIGN SECRETARY HONORS U.S. VETERANS

¶1. Summary: The November 11 Veterans Day ceremony at the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial vividly demonstrated the strength of the partnership and ties between the Philippines and the United States. The Manila offices of the American Battle Monuments Commission and the Department of Veterans Affairs coordinated an inclusive ceremony highlighting the people-to-people and nation-to-nation connections with the Philippines through veterans and military service. The Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs spoke poignantly about these connections and jointly laid a wreath in honor of all veterans. A heart rendering closing included a Philippine Armed Forces 21 gun salute, echo taps by the Philippine Armed Forces Band, and retirement of the colors by an Honor Guard of Filipino and U.S. Marines. The Ambassador hosted an open-air reception for the well-attended event where veterans from all generations mixed with senior Philippine military, government and elected officials, citizens from the American community in Manila, civic organizations, and media. The entire event received extensive, positive coverage on national TV. End Summary.

¶2. The Ambassador paid tribute to the great line of U.S. veterans connected through generations of Americans and Filipinos. Joining the Ambassador as special guests were veterans of all eras demonstrating the unbroken line of Americans and Filipinos fighting in defense of freedom and democracy. Paying tribute to the "greatest generation," the Ambassador recognized Colonel Rafael Estrada who fought valiantly in World War II, survived the Bataan Death March, and endured as a Prisoner of War by the Japanese. Representing the youngest generation of veterans was U.S. Army Specialist Jiankelly Sibug, a Filipino-American who only recently immigrated to the United States and at 24 years old proudly wore the Purple Heart he received as a result of a roadside ambush where his roommate and two others perished in Iraq. In her introduction of Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Alberto Romulo, the Ambassador praised his leadership and that of the Philippine Government in the quest for peace and international security to include a strong stand on Burma during his recent visit to the United Nations. She recognized the Secretary's personal commitment to the true partnership between the United States and the Philippines.

¶3. Secretary Romulo stated he felt honored to speak on such a hallowed ground on this momentous day. In paying tribute to the veterans he was resolute in his reaffirmation of "our shared and unyielding fidelity to the cause of peace and freedom," and he eloquently voiced the sense of partnership in all things to include "the battle to win the hearts and minds of peoples against the threats of terrorism, extremism and poverty." As the senior representative of the Philippine government, his words were moving and his sense of debt to all veterans was steadfast. The complete text of his speech is at paragraph 5.

¶4. Media coverage of the event was extensive and highly favorable. The reports, both print and electronic, underscored the partnership values echoed by U.S. and Filipino leaders. An excellent article highlighted the exceptionally mature comments of the honored veterans and their shared sense of sacrifice for our common

determination to protect freedoms.

15. Text of Secretary Romulo's Veterans Day speech:

Begin Text:

"Your Excellency Ambassador Kristie Kenney; Excellencies, the members of the Diplomatic Corps; Our beloved Veterans and their families;

We are drawn together today in honor and remembrance. We honor and remember those who paid the ultimate price that we can live in a free and peaceful world. We likewise remember - and reaffirm - our shared and unyielding fidelity to the cause of peace and freedom.

11/11/1918: A COMMITMENT TO PEACE

In 1918, nearly nine decades ago, the world rejoiced at the end of the Great War. On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month that year, the guns at last turned silent. Four years of bitter fighting had blighted much of Europe. The toll exacted was heavy: 10 million killed and an estimated 20 million wounded. This triumph fanned hopes for a millennium of peace and prosperity.

Armistice Day - which later on became Veterans Day - recalled the heroism and gallantry of Allied soldiers who fought against aggression and pursued their nation's share commitment to peace.

WORLD WAR II: BRINGING TOGETHER NATIONS AND PEOPLES FOR PEACE

Yet the bright flames of hope soon flickered when, 20 years later, another war engulfed the world, truly global in scope and far more devastating and destructive. In the ensuing battles, enduring friendships were forged in foxholes, as peace became a guiding beacon for all. Nations fought side-by-side against aggressors, making comrades - and brothers - of soldiers from both sides of the

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Pacific and the Atlantic.

In the din of bursting cannons and exploding bombs, the quest for peace never dimmed in the hearts and spirit of mankind.

THE PHILIPPINES AND US: A PARTNERSHIP STRENGTHENED BY ADVERSITY

Nowhere was this more evident than in the Pacific Theater, where Americans, Filipinos, Australians, New Zealanders and their allies, fought gallantly to stave off the aggressors. Even then, Corregidor and Bataan stood as symbols of the bravery, courage and heroism of our men and women in uniform.

When the end finally came in the Bataan peninsula, these stirring words of the Voice of Freedom reverberated throughout the world: "Men fighting under the banner of an unshakeable faith are made of something more than flesh but they are not made of impervious steel. The flesh must yield at last, endurance melts away and the end of the battle must come. Bataan has fallen, but the spirit that made stand - a beacon to all liberty-loving peoples of the world - cannot fall."

More than five decades later, the Philippines, United States and their allies remain true partners in the battle to win the hearts and minds of peoples against the threats of terrorism, extremism and poverty.

REMEMBERING THE FALLEN, HONORING THE LIVING

Many of those who have fallen in the Philippine campaign and in the Southwest Pacific lie here at the American Cemetery. On these hallowed grounds has risen this monument as a symbol of freedom and heroism. Indeed Veterans Day resonates with meaning not only for Filipinos and Americans but for all freedom loving peoples of the world. Our veterans - both American and Filipinos and their allies - are living reminders of how far we all have journeyed to enjoy our freedoms today.

Let us not forget that the 18,000 Filipino veterans and their

compatriots in the United States - who are now in the twilight of their lives - sacrificed themselves so that our generation can live to see the sun rise in a more peaceful and free world. It is our duty to honor these veterans by ensuring that we will never again go to war.

Our responsibility is to ensure that the guns of war remain forever silent. And we can only learn and live those lessons of war when we remember.

In the words of Senator Daniel Inouye - himself a veteran of the Second World War, a Congressional Medal of Honor awardee and a true friend of the Filipinos - "Let us embrace our sons and daughters with full pride and the restful assurance that the story of the veterans' journey will live on for generations to come."

Thank you and good morning!"
END TEXT.

Kenney